

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Circle Ministry Session Plan
Our Bodies, Ourselves
Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull for Circle Ministry at First Parish UU Cohasset, MA

Note: See the Circle Ministry Session Sequence for process guidelines.

Gathering, Welcoming (2 minutes)

Chalice lighting (1 minute)

Opening words (1 minute)

Amid an era of disconnection,
we connect.

Amid an era of competition,
we cooperate.

Amid an era of multi-tasking,
we tend to one person at a time.

Amid an era of high on the ladder,
we sit equidistant from a common center.

Amid an era of sound bites,
we tell our stories.

Amid an era of winner take all,
we seek to give and receive with grace and gratitude.

Check-in/Sharing (3-4 minutes@ - 30-40 minutes)

Discussion of congregational and community service plans (10-20 minutes)

Topical Discussion (60 minutes)

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence as a reminder of the structure of this segment.]

First response

Cross-conversation

Topic: Our Bodies, Ourselves

Our bodies, ourselves—a spiritual notion? Many of us have been carefully taught that body and spirit are at opposite poles of what is. Hear the thoughts of Beverly Wildung Harris, Christian ethicist and feminist. She writes:

“If we begin, as feminists must, with “our bodies, ourselves,” we recognize that all our knowledge, including our moral knowledge, is body-mediated knowledge. All knowledge is rooted in our sensuality. We know and value the world *if* we know and value it, through our ability to touch, to hear, to see.... Ideas are dependent on our sensuality. Feeling is the basic bodily ingredient that mediates our connectedness to the world. When we cannot feel, literally, we lose our connection to the world.... If we are not perceptive in discerning our feelings, or if we do not know what we feel, we cannot be effective moral agents.... Failure to live deeply in “our bodies, ourselves” destroys the possibility of moral relations between us.”

Feeling, thinking, praying, worship, acting in our world—all are bodily functions. How do we recognize ourselves? We look into mirrors. We gaze into one another’s eyes. We listen; we speak; we walk; we sit; we work; we play; we make love; we do the laundry; we prepare food. We are born and live and die as physical beings. We know pain and joy and relief and hope and the spiritual through the wonder that is our bodies.

How extraordinary it is when we speak of “our bodies betraying us” when illness strikes. It’s not “us and them” or “I and that.” It’s “me” embodied with heart, mind, and the soul that is quickened through both.

Let these thoughts sift in a few moments of silence, and consider your response to these questions:

1. How does it feel to be inside your skin? What do you love about your body/yourself? What do you struggle with about your body/yourself?
2. What is your first memory of being a physical self? Tell a story of how your bodily awareness has shifted across the span of your life. How have you grown spiritually from this shifting awareness?

(Read through both 1 and 2 and choose for discussion the questions that best fit your group.)

[See Circle Ministry Session Sequence for clarification of this next segment.]

First response

Cross-conversation

Concluding statements

What concluding thoughts would you like to share?

Feedback (15 minutes)

Thank the group. Ask what they liked in this session and what variations they would hope for.

Explain that for the next session, we’ll consider the topic, “Parenting.”

Note that the session plan for this gathering is available for group members as we leave.

Closing (1 minute)

I offer you Nancy Shaffer’s “Blessing for Bodies:”

May we creatures of bone and tissue
know our bodies well:
the fourth rib, and how it rises
higher than third, not so high as fifth;
how it feels to the thumb, slowly traced,
and under it, how the heart rests.
May we know that space where
no ribs lie, and unshielded, we bend.

May we know the bottom of each
toe, and that tender arch where
no skin touches ground;
also skin smoothed soft by clothing.

May we know the quick curve of the head
before it sits on the spine,
and the tiny hollow just behind the ear;
the length of the forearm,
lifting food to lips, and how lips become
a circle, waiting—and knowing this,
cease our study of war.

Go in peace.

Circle Ministry Session Sequence for Facilitators First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Cohasset

The suggested sequence and time allocations spelled out below will help you who facilitate our Circle Ministry sessions to ensure that every participant will have a voice over the two-hour timeframe that comprises a Circle Ministry session.

Gathering, Welcoming (5 minutes)

During the **first meeting** of your group, you might want to offer clarification on questions that people have raised:

How long do the groups meet? We're asking that each of the initial groups commit to meeting at least through May. At that time or before, you can each decide whether you want to continue in this group, move to another group, or not continue.

Why a designated facilitator and a co-facilitator? As similar groups have met in other congregations, facilitators provide assurance that each person has a voice, that we stay on topic, and that we sustain respectful dialogue. Even experiences at First Parish have taught us that groups without designated facilitators tend to fray. There are exceptions; but this is the general learning. The structure provided by facilitators is ultimately satisfying for everyone.

Introduce your co-facilitator. Clarify that this person will step in if you can't be there, and if additional congregants want to join groups and there aren't enough open spaces, s/he stands ready to be the lead facilitator for this new group.

Where will we meet regularly?

This first meeting is at [facilitator or co-facilitator]'s home. For our subsequent sessions, we're asking that one of you volunteer to be a home host. That's all you have to do! Don't clean your house for us. Don't prepare refreshments. Just open your door and welcome us in. By the end of this evening's session, I hope we'll have a home host.

How can we ensure respectful dialogue and the structure that was introduced about Circle Ministry? Our focus next week will be a behavioral covenant. I'll provide a basic covenant, and we'll go from there.

You'll continue to have questions. Toward the end of each session there will be a time to raise them.

Chalice lighting (1-2 minutes)

Check-in/Sharing (2-3 minutes@ - 20-30 minutes)

Ask each person to share **what's on their mind and heart**. You may wish to have a timekeeper to gently remind anyone who moves beyond the allotted check-in time that their sharing is valued and we need to ensure a voice for everyone. If the speaker persists, ask her/him firmly and respectfully to conclude. IF as the sessions unfold, someone arrives who has had a particularly rending experience, decide as a group your willingness to give this person extra time.

NO feedback, NO cross-talk during this segment. Simply be with each other in deep listening.

“Business” matters (up to 10 minutes)

At year's beginning, review Behavioral Covenants and session structures.

Later in the year, you'll want to discuss and plan your service projects.

Discussion (60 minutes)

Introduce the topic and the questions (2 minutes)

Ask folks to **pause and ponder** this in a period of silence. (2 minutes)

First response: Ask folks to register their initial thoughts—in random order, but with **no feedback** during this segment.

Then: Cross-conversation. IF one person dominates, gently remind that person that we need to allow time for every group member to speak.

Conclude discussion with request for **final statements/last thoughts on this topic**—in random order, but with **no feedback**.

Feedback (5-10 minutes)

Ask participants **what they liked** about this session. **What would they change? How?** Take note during succeeding sessions of **who isn't present**. Let the other members know that you'll follow up to determine if all is well or not. Remind members that if they absolutely can't make a session, to please let you know.

Closing (2 minutes)

Note: Have copies of the session available for participants at the conclusion of each session, but don't distribute them up front. If someone asks about having an outline in hand, explain that we all tend to connect more freely when we're not tied to a paper.

Thank you!

You are a valued leader in Circle Ministry as it unfolds within our faith community!